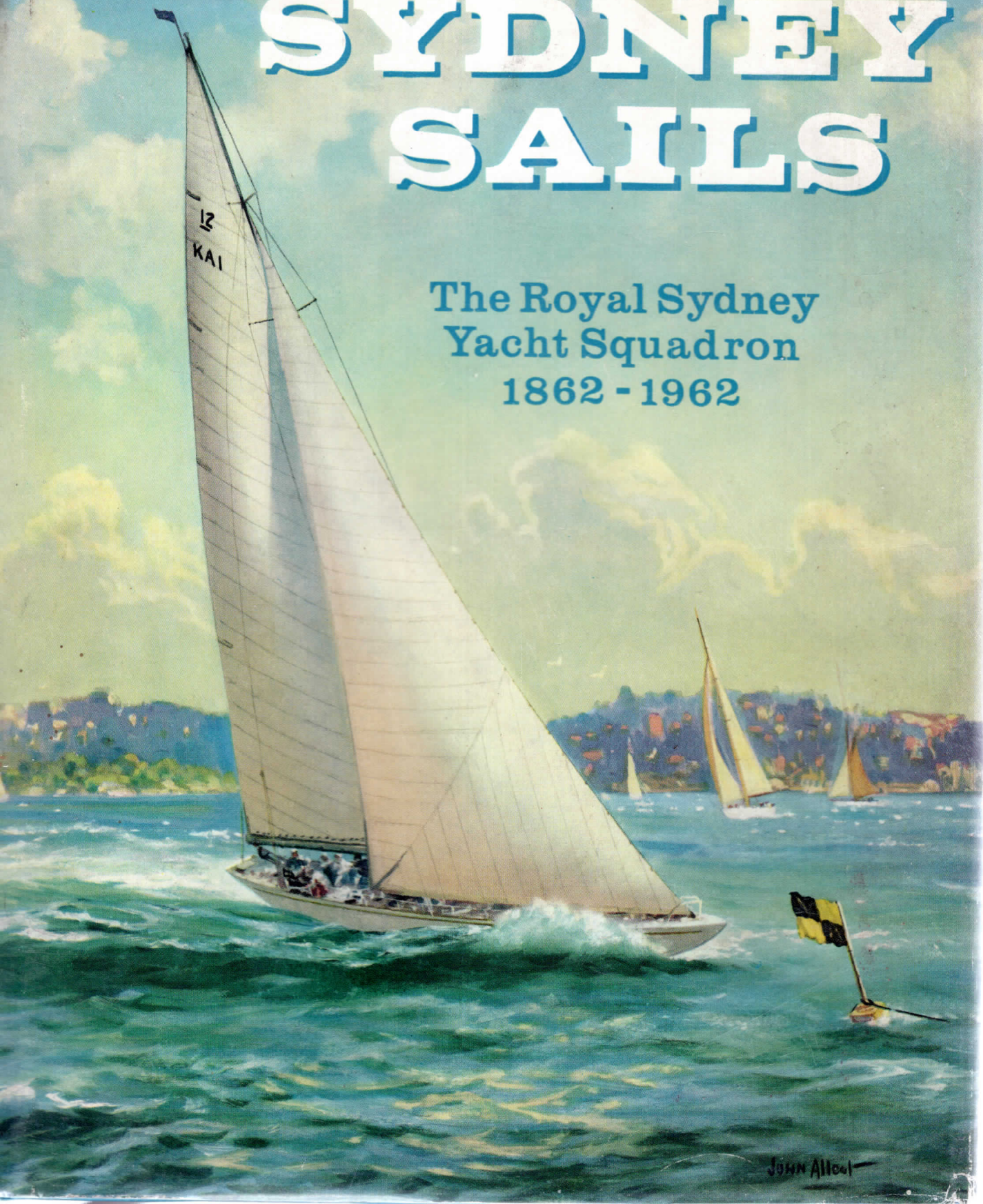


SYDNEY SAILS

The Royal Sydney
Yacht Squadron
1862 - 1962



JOHN ALCOCK

Sydney Sails

*The Story of the Royal Sydney Yacht
Squadron's First 100 Years
(1862-1962)*

Compiled for the Squadron's Committee
by
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WITH A PREFACE BY H.R.H. THE PRINCE PHILIP
DUKE OF EDINBURGH, K.G., K.T.



ANGUS AND ROBERTSON
Sydney, Australia

way of thinking, we have yielded to the dictates of natural laws, and build accordingly. The essential elements of a successful yacht are: small skin, big displacement relatively, and perfectly gradual approach and delivery. These are by no means all the qualities necessary to win prizes, but they are among the most important."

These remarks applied only to hull design, leaving sail-area and rig among the "other qualities". The "excrescences" which Reeks noted in hull design in the 1860s and 1870s were due partly to tradition and partly to experiments aimed at overcoming the difficulties of time-tonnage handicapping based on volumetric measurement, and, later, on the "Thames Rule".

Reeks highly praised the design of *Australian* (1858), *Xarifa* (1863), and a third yacht of similar design, *Alick* (1871). He described these in 1888 as "a very close approximation to the best forms known to modern times".

After the departure of *Xarifa* to Fiji, *Australian* continued to sail for many years on the register of the P.A.Y.C., under a succession of owners, and to win races under various systems of measurement and handicapping.

Alick also was registered with the P.A.Y.C. Her owner, T. M. Brown, was at one time commodore of that club. *Alick* was one of the outstanding yachts at Sydney in the 'seventies, and frequently competed with success at regattas in which yachts from both the R.S.Y.S. and the P.A.Y.C. were entered in various classes, under the several systems of measurement and handicapping.

According to notes by Jack Carroll, of Mosman, who was her helmsman, *Alick* was launched in September 1871. Her design was almost that of *Australian*, but her keel was more conventional, ending in a true stern-post, and her sides had no "tumble home". Her frames were of iron, and she was the first composite yacht built at Sydney. Her dimensions were 42 feet from stem-head to stern-post, 8 feet beam, and 6 feet draft. She was rated as 11 tons, apparently by volumetric measurement forward of the rudder-post, which was placed at least one-third of the deck length forward of the stern.

Most remarkable was *Alick's* sail-area, an aspect which was not taken into account in handicapping in the 'seventies. Her mast was 40 feet, boom 38 feet, gaff 28 feet, and bowsprit 14 feet. Carroll adds: "She won her first race at the Balmain Regatta of 1871, when she easily beat *Ella*, *Scud*, *Australian*, *Iris*, and *Osterley*, in a strong sou'-easter, after giving them time allowance."

Among the new yachts competing on that occasion, *Iris* is notable as the first yacht owned by Samuel Hordern, a young man then twenty-two years of age who had joined the P.A.Y.C. and was later to be the commodore of that club for thirteen years.

Alick was the crack yacht of the "Alfreds" and the most serious potential challenger of the Squadron's flyer, *Mistral*, then owned by the vice-commodore of the Squadron, W. O. Gilchrist; but another rival of *Mistral* was already on the stocks, and was launched in 1874. She was a cutter of 28 tons (volumetric), designed and built by W. Langford at Berry's Bay. Her name was *Magic*, and she was owned by Alfred Fairfax, who had joined the Squadron in its first year (1863). Alfred Fairfax was the cousin of James R. Fairfax, son of the founder and owner of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. James Fairfax had also joined the Squadron in its first year, and later had owned *Nereid*.

Mistral, rated at 35 tons, and *Magic*, at 28 tons, both registered with the Squadron, were the two biggest yachts then at Sydney. They were soon to be engaged in that keen and exciting tussle for supremacy which had so enlivened the sport in earlier days. They fought it out in many hard races over a number of years and, though dissimilar in design and appearance, they were so evenly matched in performance that the victory of one or the other on any day was decided chiefly by the luck of the weather and skill in their handling.

Mistral had been built at Sydney by Dan Sheehy in 1868, to the design of John Harvey of Wivenhoe (England). Her exact dimensions have not been ascertained, but she was described as having "a long fine bow, an elongated midship section, slightly hollowed from the bilge to the garboard strake, a very slight sheer, and little freeboard". She was longer and narrower than *Magic*, and she rated 7 tons bigger by volumetric measurement.

Magic had an overall (deck) length of 48 feet, with 12 feet beam and 9 feet depth. Designed and built at Sydney, she was influenced to some extent by the now well-proved principles of *Australian* and *Xarifa*. The contemporary description states: "*Magic* had not so lean entrance as *Mistral*. She sat higher in the water, with a bold spring towards the stern, and also a sheer to the tuck, giving an idea of more power than spring. Her midship section showed by far the most displacement and was nearly of the true V form."

Magic made her maiden appearance at the Anniversary Day Regatta, 26th January 1875. The only other entrants for the first-class race were *Mistral* and *Alick*. Exact information is now lacking, but it may be assumed that *Mistral* started from scratch, conceding 3½ minutes time tonnage to *Magic* and 12 minutes to *Alick*, on a course down- and up-harbour and then to Long Reef and return. The new yacht crossed the finishing-line 3½ minutes ahead of *Mistral*: a sensational result, since that was precisely the amount of her own time-tonnage allowance.

A few days later, at a Squadron race, *Magic* again defeated *Mistral*, but by such a narrow margin that supporters of *Mistral* could console